The Banjo —and YOU

The handbook of the National Society of Banjoists. — The Movement to popularise the most companionable, most fascinating and most versatile of all musical instruments.

One Shilling

My bray ye may not alter nor mistake
When I stand to jeer the fatted soul of things,
But the song of Lost Endeavour that I make,
Is it hidden in the twanging of the strings?

The Song of the Banjo.
—Rudyard Kipling.

"It is a friend of many moods, a constant companion. When I am happy and the world seems grand, my banjo is light-hearted, too. It gives a carefree tune, a rippling melody and forceful harmony full of *joie de vivre*. There is something about it in that mood that is infectious. Yet, if I am downcast, a trifle melancholy it understands. It responds with a soothing air in minor key, a melody full of depth and warmth. For that alone I would not exchange it for fifty Strads or all the trumpets in America. You see, I'm no nigger minstrel. I'm a banjo man."

Roy Burnham

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The Story of the Banjo

By A. P. SHARPE
(Editor of "B.M.G.")

IF you are not yet familiar with the banjo, perhaps you doubt whether the instrument has a "story." It has . . . and although the origin of the instrument is far from clear, I think that when we trace the banjo's progress through the years we begin to realise that it possesses a background far more interesting than at first thought possible.

Although no two writers appear to agree on the origin of the banjo, it would appear that the instrument did start (as a **banjo**—for it must be remembered that most stringed instruments possess a common origin) with three strings.

Chambers' Encyclopædia says: "The word 'banjo' was originally a mere negro mispronunciation of **bandore,** derived through the medium of Spanish and Portuguese from the Latin **pandura** and the Greek **pandoura,**" while Carl Engel, in his book **Musical Instruments,** published in 1874, suggests that the Sene-

gambian **bania** is the parent of the banjo." Other writers derive the name "banjo" from **bandore** but the Rev. Francis W. Galpin—world-famous authority on musical instruments—says in his **Text book of European Musical Instruments,** published in 1937, that "the banjo is said to have been a negro adaptation of the medieval **pandore;** the name being written at the end of the eighteenth century as **banjore.**" "On the other hand," continues the Rev. Galpin, "there is a primitive stringed instrument consisting of a shallow wooden tray (over which strings are stretched) with a short handle which the negrotic tribes of the Congo district called the **bandju.**"

NOT AMERICAN

In recent years some writers have stated that the first banjo was made in 1830 by Joel Walter (Joe) Sweeney (an American), but further research has proved that this player was merely responsible for the addition of a fifth (probably the bass) string to the four-string instrument in vogue before this date. It is generally conceded, however, that "Joe" Sweeney was responsible for the start of the popularity of the banjo in the U.S.A. Contrary to the opinions of many Americans, the banjo is not solely a product of their country. It is true the instrument was vastly improved upon over a period of years in the U.S. but, at the same time, totally different developments were taking place in England. If proof of this were needed one has only to mention the fact than the six- and seven-string banjos in

use in England during the nineteenth century were unknown in America.

FIRST KNOWN REFERENCE

G. A. Keeler (an enthusiastic banjoist in England and an indefatigable searcher for details of the banjo's early life) has discovered that James Grainger, M.D. (an Englishman) mentions the banjo in a didatic poem written in 1763, entitled "The Sugar Cane" and although this writer refers to the **banshaw** he adds a footnote to the effect that "this is a sort of crude guitar invented by the negroes," but an even earlier reference to the banjo (although not actually by name) is made in Sir Hans Sloan's **Voyage to Madeira and Jamaica,** published in 1707 but written in 1688. This writer says: "The Jamaican negroes had several sorts of instruments in imitation of lutes" and goes on to say that "the instruments are sometimes made of hollowed timber, covered with parchment or other skin." It is interesting to note that in the second volume of this book there is a drawing of two instruments almost identical in shape to the early-known banjos.

Another early literary reference to the banjo is in President Jefferson's **Notes on Virginia** (1781) where, on page 283, he says (speaking of the negroes in Virginia) "the instrument proper to them (the negroes) is the **banjar** which they brought hither from Africa."

THE MINSTRELS

One of the earliest-known banjos in existence is in the South Kensington (London)

Museum and dates back to the early eighteenth century. This is a lute-shaped instrument with a small body and long handle and has five strings.

It is an undoubted fact that the many "minstrels" were the people who did much to make the banjo generally known. To the pioneer work of the Christy Minstrels (who toured America, England and the Colonies) all credit is due for bringing the banjo before the public, and although the banjo was mainly used to accompany vocal items in the minstrel shows, it was brought to the notice of the people who were later to spread banjo interest.

EARLY FORMS OF PLAYING

Most of the early forms of playing the banjo were more spectacular than musical and the thimble (fitted to the first finger of the right hand) was the means of vibrating the strings. Later, more ambitious players came along and simple solos were attempted. As the construction of the instrument improved (and here it may be noted that all improvements to the banjo have been carried out by white men —the negroes having no part in the mechanical improvements of the instrument) finger playing became popular, completely changing all strokes formerly based on the playing of the Spanish guitar. During this period many instruction books referred to the new finger-playing as the "guitar style."

Finger playing gradually ousted thimble playing and then, in 1882, Dan Polk (a mandolinist of unusual talent who lived in Kansas

City, U.S.A.) originated plectrum playing on the banjo, although it was not until many years later that plectrum playing became the vogue. Here it might be mentioned that it was the inclusion of the banjo in the dance band that brought about this popularity, and it was this renewed popularity that caused the tenor-banjo (an instrument that looks like a banjo but is tuned in fifths at the same pitch as the viola) to come into existence.

EARLY BANJOS

But let us attempt, as far as we are able, to look at the story of the banjo in chronological order.

Up to the year 1838 the banjo was a crudely-made instrument with wooden hoop and a plain fingerboard, with the parchment (or vellum) tacked on with brass-headed nails. Any tightening of the vellum was accomplished by holding it before a fire! In this year (1838) the first brass-rimmed shell with hook-like tighteners was introduced in New York (U.S.A.) by Henry C. Dobson, and by 1840 the word banjo was firmly established, for it occurs in many published songs written at this period.

By 1845 experiments had been made with frets. At first these were pieces of gut tied round the handle, but later inlaid frets were tried. Two years later raised metal frets (as in use today) were tried and it was this period in the history of the banjo that harmony was first attempted on it.

In 1859, Hercules MacCord (of St. Louis) fitted a tube through the arm for the fifth (or octave) string, eliminating the side octave peg, but this feature met with little success and is today seldom found on a banjo, although it is extensively used in zither-banjo manufacture.

A SHORTER SCALE

Up to the year 1863 the banjo was tuned a minor third lower than it is today; a higher pitch being impossible due to the length of the fingerboard. In 1863 the shorter scale was evolved and the raising of the pitch gave the banjo the true characteristic tone always associated with it.

The few English makers of banjos seemed to be content to follow the Americans. At this time there were many first-class banjos on the market (usually with smooth—unfretted —fingerboards as frets were not universally in use).

About the year 1870, Albert Wilson (of Troy, N.Y.) veneered the wooden rim of the banjo with thin German silver (white brass) and this idea was later improved upon by Jas. W. Clarke, of New York City, while in 1878 S. S. Stewart produced the wood-lined, German-silver hoop familiar to most players today.

THE BOHEE BROTHERS

In 1881 the famous Bohee Brothers visited England from the U.S. with Haverly's Coloured Minstrels. James Bohee was the

soloist and although he played on a smooth arm fingerboard (later he did use an instrument with five frets) he started a banjo craze that did much to make the instrument popular. Banjos without frets were still in the majority and, in England, the popular instrument had six strings (some players were even using seven-string banjos) whilst most solos seldom ventured above the fifth position.

Strings up to this time were all gut; wire strings not being adopted until some twenty-odd years later.

By 1883, MacCord was making banjos with as many as twenty-one frets but his "innovation" was slow in gaining favour.

NOTHING STANDARD

Anything approaching a "standard" of banjo construction was yet to be found. Size of hoop; the number of frets; length of fingerboard: all varied to suit the individual player.

In 1885 the first metal tailpiece made its appearance. Hitherto an ebony tailpiece (as still used on instruments of the violin family) was the method of affixing the strings, whilst the "push-in" type of peg (also copied from the violin) was the usual method of tuning. Banjo strings (as such) were unknown; most tutors and methods of the time giving details of what violin and guitar strings to use on the instrument.

THE ZITHER-BANJO

Writing in 1888, S. S. Stewart said: "Not many years ago a banjo was patented and

called the 'closed back' banjo. This instrument is accredited to a banjo maker named Parsons (who lived in New York) and Henry C. Dobson later improved upon it." This was the instrument later improved upon by Alfred D. Cammeyer and brought to this country early in 1888 and called by him the **zither-banjo.** The "closed-back" banjo was never popular in America and was considered a failure from a musical standpoint, but it had (and has) countless devotees in England.

INCREASING POPULARITY

By 1893 the banjo had attained a great popularity in England and instruments with sixteen frets and five strings were rapidly gaining favour. There is no doubt that the increase in the number of frets and the minor improvements constantly being introduced, corresponded with the more advanced phases of banjo music. More and more English makers were entering the field to produce instruments to meet the popular demand; some of the better known being W. E. Temlett, J. E. Dallas, Arthur Tilley, John Abbott, Windsor and Taylor, Alfred Weaver, Richard Spencer and J. Riley.

Clifford Essex' **Royal Pierrots** and Will C. Pepper's **White Coons** helped to spread banjo interest and banjo festivals became a regular feature in many of the larger towns of England and Scotland.

In America, the banjo was the instrument of the few. Outstanding players like Vess Ossman, Fred van Eps, Brent Hayes, A. A.

Farland, Parke Hunter and Fred Bacon were still delighting audiences and amateur players were to be found in most cities, but the popularity had waned.

In England we possessed a few outstanding soloists who, by means of their public appearances and gramophone records were spreading banjo interest; perhaps the most notable being Olly Oakley and John Pidoux.

More and more worthwhile music for the banjo was being published and amateur banjo bands (usually under the direction of a local teacher) sprung up all over the country.

"BOOM" PERIOD

And then in 1910 the "boom" period in the history of the banjo started. It was in this year that the banjolin, tenor-banjo and plectrum-banjo made their appearance in America. Products of the dance-band, they put the banjo before the general public as it had never been done before. In a short time whenever one heard a dance band one heard the banjo (or one of its "family") and it is an undoubted fact that many players took up the instrument from hearing it played for dancing.

In the autumn of 1913 a Clifford Essex Dance Band appeared at the "400 Club" (now the Embassy) in London—the first dance band to use a banjo in England.

The advent of the plectrum guitar in 1926 started the decline of the banjo in the dance band and its gradual disappearance from the eyes and ears of the public marked its relega-

tion to the amateur players who, nevertheless, can still be numbered in thousands.

In England there are still many front-rank artists of the banjo; keeping alive the fine music it is possible to draw forth from an instrument that will never die. The modern banjo is an instrument into which all the craftsman's skill has been poured; a work of art which will give a lifetime's service and produce music to compare with any other instrument; music which only the banjo can produce.

The "Story of the Banjo" is still in its early stages; more thrilling chapters have yet to be written, and I am convinced that the National Society of Banjoists will have no small hand in helping to write these chapters. The "Story" is one that will never be finished, for I am fully convinced that the banjo will never die.

Succeeding and uniform with this publication:

BANJO FACTS

By A. P. SHARPE
(Editor of "B.M.G.")

Deals with every conceivable point regarding the Testing, Valuation, Care, Adjustment, Stringing and upkeep of the Instrument. The writer condenses into this small volume years of unique experience: it is worthy of possession by every Banjoist.

National Society of Banjoists

CONSTITUTION, ETC.

Resulting from the inaugural meeting at Cowdray Hall, Henrietta Place, London, W.1, on June 26th, 1943, we are able to announce the following details:

TYPES OF MEMBERSHIP

(1) **Members:** 10s. per annum (i.e., the general body of members).

(2) **Associates:** 5s. per annum (i.e., those playing allied fretted instruments, such as mandolin, guitar, balalaika, Hawaiian guitar, ukelele, etc.

Note.—It is recognised that as members of B., M. & G. Bands, players of the other fretted instruments will be interested in the Society, which will be able to render them a degree of service. It will, however, not be possible in the early stages to give them the same service as it is hoped to give to the general body of members, hence the smaller subscription. When the number of members playing allied instruments (i.e., Associates) warrants it, it is possible a separate Society will be formed for them, rendering similar services to those which this Society gives to banjoists.

(3) **Fellows:** 10s. per annum. Members qualify for Fellowship by seven years' uninterrupted membership of the Society. Fellows will be entitled to the distinguishing

letters " F.N.S.B." after their names.

(4) **Life Fellows:** One payment of 10 guineas. Life Fellows also to be entitled to the distinguishing letters " F.N.S.B."

Note.—This is not intended as any sort of bargain in membership. It is a membership of honour for those in a position to assist the Society with funds.

METHOD OF PAYMENT

(1) One-half of the membership fee (for any type of membership) shall, in the preliminary period of the Society's activities, be deemed to be towards the " Assets Fund " and one-half actual subscription.

(2) Application for membership may be made by letter or on the form printed on page 32. The appropriate remittance **must** accompany the form.

(3) In the early stages, subscriptions will be held in " Trust " pending the accumulation of a sufficient number of members and the Society being in a position to actively benefit its members.

PRESIDENT & HEADQUARTERS

Byron Davies, F.R.S.A., was unanimously elected President of the Society and he will conduct its activities from 52, Earls Court Square, London, S.W.5.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

An Advisory Committee of prominent

Teachers, Professionals, Composers, etc., is being formed.

LOCAL SECRETARIES

It is desired to have local secretaries in every town and city (in London, in each district) and those willing to act in this capacity should communicate with the Society. A special form outlining the suggested duties of a local secretary will be sent on application.

SOCIETY'S BULLETIN

As soon as possible the "Proceedings" of the Society will be issued and circulated to all members; either monthly or quarterly, as may be found necessary. It is hoped that this Bulletin will:

(a) Effect "contacts" of members resident in the same locality.

(b) Be an open forum for the expression of members' views and suggestions.

(c) Provide a guide to the Society in the way it can benefit members.

(d) Effect a "pooling of ideas" so that every district will be automatically informed of what is happening in every other district.

(e) Provide an up-to-date record of banjo activities.

Note.—It is not intended that the Bulletin shall be a publication available to the general public; it will have a private circulation, restricted to all types of members.

CERTIFICATE OF MEMBERSHIP

A certificate of membership will be issued to all members. It will specify the type of membership and be signed by the President and two members of the advisory committee. It will be a condition of issue that the certificate is the property of the Society and must be returned should a member cease to be a paying member.

BADGE OF MEMBERSHIP

As soon as conditions permit, a badge of membership will be produced and become available to all members so that they may recognise their fellow-members.

OUTLINE OF THE SOCIETY'S SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

The Society enters upon a "five-year plan" to:—

(1) Bring back the popularity of the banjo and increase the number of new players. It is hoped to secure at least 10,000 new devotees.

(2) Render service to existing players.

The following, which is subject to additions and amendments, summarises some of the methods by which it is hoped to achieve the above two objects.

(a) **Concerts** in London and "key" cities. These may be of three types: (1) Soloists; (2) B. M. & G. Orchestral; (3) Contests.

(b) **Free classes** teaching the elementary rudiments **only.**

Note.—The object of these free classes is only to create a preliminary interest and they are intended to assist in the creation of pupils for, and not to compete against, teachers.

(c) **Instructional records,** i.e., gramophone records having on the one side the rendition of a solo by a prominent player or teacher, and on the reverse a "lesson," with musical illustrations, on its correct interpretation.

(d) **Establishment of clubs.** It is hoped, at an early date, to establish a permanent "always-working" and centrally-situated club in London; available to all members visiting or resident in the Metropolis. It is also hoped to assist the establishment of clubs in "key" cities, followed by others in less densely-populated areas.

(e) **New music.** By means of the Bulletin it is hoped to glean the wishes of members in respect of new music and to make arrangements with publishers for its production and, possibly, free distribution by the Society to members.

(f) **Massed bands.** Developing out of the concerts, it is hoped to hold a massed bands exhibition composed of bands from all parts of the country.

(g) **Marketing of talent.** It is hoped to encourage the introduction of the banjo into:

(1) Productions for which it may be suitable; (2) Vaudeville and Concert programmes; (3) Broadcasting, recording and television.

(h) **Press publicity.** Speaking generally, the national and local newspapers have no reflection of the banjo as a musical instrument and the Society will, on all possible occasions, supply Press Bulletins.

The above are only suggestive. Further ideas will be welcomed and given the fullest consideration.

MEMBERSHIP AT REDUCED RATE FOR H.M. FORCES.

Members of H.M. Forces Serving Abroad.—FREE membership for first year.

Members of Home Forces (excepting part-time Service, such as Home Guard, but including Auxiliary full-time Services, such as A.T.S., W.A.A.F., A.R.P., N.F.S., etc.).—2/6d. subscription for first year.

AFFILIATION OF INSTITUTES, CLUBS, BANDS, SOCIETIES, ETC.

Responding to a suggestion on the subject, the Society will affiliate as a Body any institute, class, club, etc., having aims allied to or similar to its own. The members of such allied Bodies will through the Secretary, Leader or Principal enjoy a form of semi-Membership of the Society, the actual conditions of which will be explained from time to time. For example, members of such affiliated Bodies will enjoy the concession of Concert Tickets at members' rates, and be able to pur-

chase at the published price the special solos which the Society sponsors—which are supplied free to individual members. The fee for such affiliated Bodies is One Guinea Yearly.

The Society reserves the right to refuse an Enrolment without stating a reason.

LIST OF LOCAL SECRETARIES.

If there is a local Secretary in your vicinity, he will be pleased to assist you, and tell you more about the work of our Society. Those marked * give FREE INSTRUCTION IN THE FIRST RUDIMENTS OF PLAYING THE BANJO.

Blackpool, Lancs.	Percy Nava, 28 Raikes Parade.
*Birmingham	Roy Verrell, 42 Greenwood Avenue, Acocks Green.
*Bristol	Russell Pizzey, 19 Holly Guest Road, Mount Hill, Hanham.
***Carlisle, Cumb.**	W. I. Stewart, 21 South Street.
Croydon	Alfred W. Simmonds, 63, Cedar Road.
***Chelmsford, Essex**	Geo. A. Murgatroyd, 51a Moulsham Street.
***Chippenham, Wilts.**	S. Alves, 71b Lowden.
*Gateshead-on-Tyne, 9.	J. Holliday, Classic Picture House, Kell's Lane.

***Hazel Grove, Cheshire**	W. H. Lewis, 13 Dorothy Road.
***Inverness (Scotland)**	Alexander Scatterty, 38 High Street.
Llandudno	F. T. Webber, Shirley, St. Annes Gardens, Llanrhos.
***Prescot, Lancs.**	Fred. W. Paget, 42 Eccleston Street.
Preston, Lancs.	Eugene Earle, 16 Cannon Street.
Rotherham	D. Rands, 4, Godstone Road.
***Southampton**	Norman W. Vine, 10 Dodwell Lane, Bursledon.
***Taunton**	L. J. Thomas, "Laguna," Wyndham Road. (Tel. 3088.)
***Workington, Cumb.**	Geo. Copeland, 112 Harrington Road.

LONDON.

***North**	Teddy Dupree, 13 Woodland Road, New Southgate, N.11.
***East**	G. J. Holmes, 25 Chesterton Terrace, E.13.
***West**	A. W. Jeffery, 66 Chepstow Road, Bayswater, W.2.

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Roy Burnham, 3, Fursby House, Nether Street, Finchley, London, N.3.

You Lucky Banjoists!

By A. FIDLER.

Any man who prides himself on a sound philosophy should not only do all he can to understand his own complex nature: he should also do what he can to enrich that nature which entails the fullest possible development of his personality. That calls for investments of the right sort but the "divi" is not something you calculate in terms of £ s. d. Anyone who has struggled to master a musical instrument, who has paid out hard cash to do so, knows in his heart what he wants from that investment both of time and money. He wants to play.

It is just here where I have so much in common with the readers of this book. Amateur musicians, be they Banjo enthusiasts or Fiddle maniacs (as I happen to be) invest, musically speaking, in themselves and it is their fault entirely if dividends aren't forthcoming. As an amateur violinist I know what a grand return I am getting for the money I have spent on my musical education and the teacher who struggled with me (and with my poor erstwhile fingers!) has a great deal to be proud of: think of it, right through my declining years the fiddle is going to be one of the companions whom I could never leave by the wayside. It is a solace and a joy —and it can be a sure way of ridding myself of neighbours whose company I do not seek!

But as a **companionable** instrument I must confess to a sneaking regard for the Banjo and as an instrument which has banded men and women together and made them "kin" nothing I know of equals it. It is in this that I envy the Banjoists; they will talk shop one to another well after closing time, will travel miles to their beloved concerts and to their Banjo Clubs and now, forsooth, they answer the wonderful clarion call which Byron Davies has made to organise themselves within the N.S.B. and embark on a long-term policy for putting the Banjo right on the map.

Well, don't for pity's sake, oust the Violin altogether! Perhaps, with no-one like Byron Davies to champion my difficult instrument, violinists will eventually die out as a section of the musical public. They'll fade away from sheer ennui! There would certainly be little danger of this if the N.S.B. President could direct his energies (only a small part, for instance, of that tremendous force he puts into his N.S.B. Presidency) into the musical channel which most interests me.

But meanwhile I am inside your Society, as a Violinist, because:—

1. I want to support Byron Davies in the grand job of work he is doing. It may be that some day I shall persuade him to publicise the fiddle to the same extent as he now publicises the Banjo.

2. I am likely to learn a great deal from what Banjoists are doing and their

present activity seems to me to be a "writing on the wall." Whatever the past history of the Banjo may be I am convinced that it is now (or again!) an "up and coming instrument." Varying the words of a song of not so long ago "Byron Davies will make it so."

3. As an Associate member of the N.S.B. I am looking forward to all the benefits which my membership gives me—in themselves a considerable attraction to any music lover.

4. I want to discover what it is about the Banjo that makes all the performers on it a "fraternity."

5. I want (confession!) to find out whether I shall have to succumb to a wish I already have to learn the Banjo myself!

The above reasons are good enough for me and in joining the Society I've acted on my declared policy of always "enriching myself." By putting money (if only five bob) into the funds of the Society I have done something which is going to yield good dividends. Dividends of the right sort as I said before—those that make a person more vital, that drive away boredom and that do not need a ready reckoner or a stock enchange report to explain them!

The Society sponsors the production of new Solos: the first, "All's Well," by Tarrant Bailey, Jun., is FREE to first 500 members. More to follow.

Making Your Own Music.

By JACK HOLLIDAY.

That outstanding miracle of modernity, that enables one, say, in London to hear a pin drop in New York—Radio—has, despite its undoubted benefits had one serious disadvantage. Soon after it was proclaimed to the world, you would see advertisements from people who wished to exchange their pianos, or other musical instruments for wireless sets. Why go through the tedium of learning to play, when one can hear the best music, as though it is being played in one's own home?—many asked. There might have been some substance to the question if the listening had been of a critical, analytical kind: had it cultivated musical taste. It achieved this in very, very few instances: in the majority of cases the Radio became a mere background, making disjointed conversation still more disjointed, and, astounding as it may be, we not only lost the art of playing . . . we lost also the ability to listen.

The result has been to rob this generation, this epoch, of a great asset towards individual self-expression, and consequently self-development. It is not so much a question of whether it is "necessary" to learn to play an instrument, as to ask oneself what is gained from it. Scientific investigation has proved that we exercise our faculties to so small an extent that we can be said to be only semi-conscious, only half alive: one of those faculties is, of

course, the sense of hearing—and this important faculty is developed and exercised enormously when one starts learning an instrument. As a hobby Music is the least expensive, the most satisfying, and creates, as no other, a whole series of joys of achievement. There is a fascination, especially in respect of the Banjo, in "following-out" a solo, its construction, the different "effects" that can be introduced into it that surpasses most other pleasure-pastimes—in comparison the quite useless jig-saw puzzles, pin-table machines, cross-word puzzles, etc., which are also products of modernity will be totally eclipsed.

What are the advantages of making your own Music? It would need all the pages of this booklet to enumerate them all, and I could not claim to know them all. Briefly: (a) The development of the sense of hearing. (b) The joy of achievement. (c) The Companionship, highly pronounced in the Banjo, which above all instruments can respond to every mood, from the sprightliest, liveliest, most inspiriting or most martial music—to the soulful reverie, or sympathetic intermezzo, or the soulful ballad. One is never lonely if he has a banjo on his knee. (d) The social aspect: "someone who can play" is always the "Lion" of the evening, ever welcome at a party, always the object of envy. Apart from this the Banjo, most peculiarly to itself, is a great friendship maker, and other writers in this booklet, and consequently elsewhere, acknowledge the many friendships and social avenues that have

been opened-up as a direct result of their Banjo interest. (e) It is a change of occupation. Reading, writing, drawing, stitching may be fairly akin to what one does in the course of earning a livelihood: learning an instrument will be a complete change, as good as a rest, giving mental refreshment, and taking the "rough edge off" the monotony and routine of life. (f) It opens up a "new world," just as a new world was opened up when one first acquired the ability to read—the world of music is full of wonderful things to discover.

To these several advantages of "Making one's own Music" must be added the great self-gratification that is brought to the player when he entertains others: the universal language of music has cheered so many during the recent dark days of our history, and the many amateur musicians who have appeared in Camps, Works, etc., who have helped to raise funds for deserving causes, will have pleasant memories of having done their "Bit," that will survive lifelong. As a "side-line," regarded commercially, there can be few more profitable sources of part-time revenue: from a single concert a fee comparable with that received for a full week's work is quite usual.

Then, when one progresses to professional status, there are added advantages: in addition to what one received as a performer proper, there are broadcasting, recording, televising fees; payments for authorship, royalties, etc.

Happily, and contrarily to what is said at the start of this article, there is a swing in the pendulum: everywhere there is evidence of a growing enlightenment—a desire to "Know" and to "Do." One may expect, in the very near future, for a wholesome revival of musical interest: numerous people will desire to play an instrument and to enjoy the fascination, the never-ending joy of "Making one's own Music."

Happy Days with the Banjo.

By L. T. BROOMFIELD

(The well-known "B.M.G." writer)

You've read a lot concerning the Banjo's "Big Shots," heard of their wonderful technique, possibly heard them play in "flesh and bone" or on Records—comparisons with one's own efforts generally provokes rather mixed feelings. One of the best opportunities for hearing the records of famous players is provided by A. P. Sharpe's series of Broadcasts "With a Banjo on my knee"—he has a unique collection, and the broadcasts ensure hearing what may never be repeated.

Records nearly always "flatter" the player, because the Banjo records extremely well. The tone production is brilliant; the slide effect, when used, stands out well. I recall making records on the old cylinder-type phonograph; when I heard them I could hardly recognise

my own playing . . . they sounded so well. When I say this, I would make it clear that the improvement only relates to the matter of "Tone": the player's execution remains as it actually is. The point is that the ordinary player listening to a record, then to himself ing, does tend to feel that he has retrogressed.

Another point of comparison is provided by the instrument that is played. If an amateur has only a cheap instrument, it is possible that he is getting the best out of it, and that a "crack" player could not get more—the professional may have an instrument costing anything from twenty to fifty guineas. It is, after all, not entirely necessary for the amateur, playing for his own amusement, to achieve all that a professional must do to earn a living at it. Every amateur, however, will do well to get the best instrument he can afford: apart from "sound" they are easier to play.

Many things prevent the amateur from reaching the "High Spots"—he cannot get sufficient time to practise; cannot afford the super 'Jo; may not have the advantage of the best and regular lessons. Many have to teach themselves: some make an astoundingly good job of it—but it is uphill work without a teacher, though the sense of achievement is greater. The National Society of Banjoists will no doubt improve matters in regard to teachers by organising the teaching side on a business footing . . . you can safely leave this to Byron Davies. He will see to it that, in course of time, teaching facilities are available to the fullest extent—and many other things besides.

My job, in my series of "B.M.G." articles, is to smooth out your playing difficulties as much as I can; to encourage you to persevere; to bring back your interest when it lags; to remind you that, however good a player may be, he once had to tread the same paths; your difficulties were once his . . . he overcame them, so can you.

Some are placed or born more favourably for good Banjo playing than others. A striking example is that well-known Radio and Recording Artiste, Tarrant Bailey, Jun., whom I once had the pleasure of meeting. I recall it, but he may not: he was rather rude to me, and would neither speak with or have anything to do with me—in fact, I had the feeling that he was "making faces" at me! Not surprising perhaps, as he was then only nine months old, when I saw him in his mother's arms, when I visited his father at Bath. If ever a young fellow was favoured by birth for Banjo playing it was he!—his father being the leading teacher and player of the West Country. He started playing at the age of three, upon a banjo specially constructed for him by Clifford Essex. He only recently (1943) told us of the many rewards and great happiness the Banjo has brought him: how it has made him so many good friends, given him so many good times. It can bring all these things to YOU.

The Society will be pleased to introduce any of its members who are professional Teachers to those interested in learning the Banjo.

Twelve Hints for Beginners.

By J. B. DACRE.

(1) Buy the best instrument you can afford, and if possible get the advice of a player before acquiring—this will prevent your getting an instrument with a warped neck, worn-down frets or some similar defect. If a high-grade instrument is beyond your means, you can still learn a great deal on a cheaper one.

(2) Don't be entirely afraid of using your "musical sense" by playing "by ear," but don't restrict yourself to it—learn to play from printed music as soon as you can, and the quicker you can memorise a solo, the more you will be able to develop your musical sense, especially in the "Expression," tone and "feeling" you put into your playing.

(3) Go to the best teacher available: in all instruction "the best is the cheapest," and there is no finer investment than an investment in oneself. You can, of course, learn the first rudiments from one of the N.S.B. Free Classes, if available in your district: but this is their intended limitation, and as soon as you have had your first "taste" of what pleasure is in store by learning the Banjo, you should by preference have some private lessons from a recognised, experienced teacher.

(4) If there is a Club or Class available, don't be timid of attending it. There is a wonderful esprit de corps, a camaraderie among the players of fretted instruments that

does not prevail, at least to the same extent, among players of other instruments. The majority of players are keen to assist their less advanced friends, and you will gain much by joining a Class or Club—in addition to the social side of things, and the making of, quite possibly, really fine friendships through "the universal language of Music."

(5) If you can find a friend, starting with you on the great Banjorial adventure, you will be indeed lucky: you can practise together, assist each other in the understanding and interpretation of the various interesting little problems you come across as you proceed from "Zero" up to "Soloist" standard. If there is, mixed with this grand colleagueship and mutual help, a friendly rivalry to see who can "touch the high-spots" first, with a prize or a friendly "bet" attached to it . . . well, "the Banjo world and all that's in it, is yours, my son," as Rudyard Kipling might have expressed it.

(6) Set a high objective for yourself, and check your progress on the way by, say, trying for the "B.M.G. Diplomas." Additionally, if you have the opportunity take part in the "Discoveries" Section of the Concerts organized by the National Society of Banjoists, at which Silver Medals and other awards are made: apart from a test of your technique on the instrument, they will assist your personality as a performer . . . get you used to playing before an audience: one of the greatest delights of being able to play an instrument, whether it is for money or not.

(7) Whether you actually take part or not, you should attend the Concerts: they portray the Banjo at its best, with great distinctions in the "Styles" of various performers.

(8) Don't neglect the Tutor—and get a good one—followed by perhaps a book of exercises or studies. Many pupils make the mistake of going only a small part of the way through a Tutor, and then devote themselves entirely to solo playing—which latter, as one writer expresses it, should be the "Sweets." The Tutor covers all the technical points: if you master them, you will have also mastered a whole range of solos, because these technical points occur and recur through them all . . . this is speaking generally, because there are, of course, solos with their own special difficulties: they are in the minority.

(9) Concentrate upon your difficulties: the things with which you find no difficulty can take care of themselves. If there is, for example, a part in a solo at which you always stumble or "break down," practise that one small section until you can do it blindfoldedly or, as the saying goes, "in your sleep."

(10) Don't be deterred by the opinions of those who disparage or condemn the Banjo, simply because they know nothing about it: if you, in learning this delightful instrument are doing what you want to do, even for half-an-hour daily, then you will know the real and true meaning of the word "Freedom" . . . so few enjoy the freedom of doing what they, themselves, want to do: the multitude, strange as it may be, are doing exclusively the things the others want them to do.

(11) In the early stages it may seem that the more you practise, the worse you play. It is, of course, not so in reality: the explanation is that with practice your sense of musical hearing becomes more developed. A difference of half-a-tone might not be a discord to the embryo musician, but a difference of one sixty-fourth of a semi-tone is distinctly audible to a highly trained musical ear.

(12) There are times when too regular "Application" to the achievement of any objective causes one, as it were, to go "stale": a slight rest from the instrument may result, strangely again, in your playing better when you return to it.

So, here you have a round dozen "Hints" from someone who has trod the ground that you may be shortly following: they are worthy of consideration and adherence, because, in whatever sphere it may be, one should profit from the experience of others. I do not think that I can close this little article more aptly than by quoting Hesiod: "That man is the most excellent who can always think for himself. He, too, is a good man who will take some advice from others. But he who can neither think for himself, nor will listen to the sound advice of others is a worthless man."

JOIN THE N.S.B. Application Form on next page, but if you do not wish to mutilate this booklet, you can apply by letter.

If you wish to join the National Society of Banjoists, fill up and return this form.

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

To:—
BYRON DAVIES, F.R.S.A., President,
National Society of Banjoists,
52, Earls Court Square,
London, S.W.5.

I hereby make application for membership of the Society, as specified below, and agree to conform to the Rules as now existing or as hereafter amended. I understand that if my application is not accepted the membership fee enclosed herewith will be returned in full.

TYPE OF MEMBERSHIP. State if:—
(a) Ordinary. (b) Associate. (c) Life Fellow

.....

Annual or Life Fee enclosed £ : s. d.

(Note: One half of fee will be allotted to "Assets Fund" and one half to actual subscription)

NAME IN FULL (state Mr., Mrs., Miss, or give title):—

.....

(Please write Name & Address in BLOCK CAPITALS)

ADDRESS (in full):—

.....

.....

.....

TELEPHONE No. (if any).....

In a forthcoming Publication:

(1) We want to include a COMPLETE DIRECTORY of all Players, Teachers, Publishers, Clubs, Classes, Instrument Dealers, etc. If members, full details will be inserted FREE OF CHARGE.

(2) We want to include addresses of LOCAL SECRETARIES IN EVERY TOWN AND CITY. If you are willing to act as Local Secretary, send for "Form 3."

(3) We want to know of any Locality that can organize a BANJO CELEBRITY CONCERT, guaranteeing the Sale of 100 Tickets (minimum) at not less than 2/6d. each—this will enable us to arrange a Recital Tour of a well-known Player or Records Recitalist. A booklet in preparation deals with every point likely to arise in the organization of such Concerts.

National Society of Banjoists
Handbook

The Story of the Banjo

By A. P. SHARPE

Errata.

"THE BANJO—AND YOU."

Page 3 (8 lines from top) the word "didactic" has been mispelt and should be as here shown.

Page 3 (15 lines down). The surname is also incorrect and should be Sloane. (N.B.: Sir Hans Sloane's Library formed the nucleus of the British Museum Library).

Page 6 (8 lines from bottom). The surname of the New York City Banjo Maker referred to was *Clark* (not "Clarke" as printed).

Mr. G. A. Keeler gave a full account in the "Banjo World" of February, 1899: (1) of Dr. Grainger's reference to the banshaw" (banjo) of A.D. 1763; (2) President Jefferson's remarks of A.D., 1781, and (3) in 1932 Mr. Keeler discovered the *seventeenth century* sketches of the banjo by Sir Hans Sloane's artist and described his discovery fully in "B.M.G." the same year.

Chambers' Encyclopædia says: "The word 'banjo' was originally a mere negro mispronunciation of **bandore,** derived through the medium of Spanish and Portuguese from the Latin **pandura** and the Greek **pandoura,**" while Carl Engel, in his book **Musical Instruments,** published in 1874, suggests that the Sene-